

Chapter 3

Section 1

Section III
Substance Abuse

A. 12-step Program

This section of the program will focus on the established 12-Step Treatment Program to address addiction, abuse history, and personal responsibility. Facility and volunteer staff will cofacilitate materials through process groups, AA/NA meetings, and treatment teams.

PROGRAM MATERIALS

1. Individuals will successfully complete all 12 steps of the 12-Step Program.
 - A. Attend weekly AA/NA meetings
 - B. Complete supplemental substance abuse materials through treatment interventions
 - C. Process weekly substance abuse issues during unit process group



THE
NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS
STEP WORKING GUIDES

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Narcotics Anonymous World Services, Inc.
Chatsworth, California

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PREFACE

The idea for this piece of literature came from the Narcotics Anonymous Fellowship itself. Beginning in the early 1980s, we began receiving Twelve Step guides and step worksheets along with requests that we develop a standard set of guides for the NA Fellowship to use in working through the Twelve Steps. Fellowship demand propelled this project up the NA World Service Conference Literature Committee's priority worklists, and finally resulted in the World Service Conference directing the WSCLC to go ahead with the project at WSC'95.

The working title for this project for many years was the "Step Writing Guides." However, we recognized that the word "writing" imposed a limitation on members who may be unable to write or may choose not to use writing as the means for working the Twelve Steps. Therefore, the title became the *Step Working Guides*.

Each chapter includes both narrative and questions. The narrative is meant to provoke thought about the questions, but is not meant to be comprehensive. There is a difference in "voice" between the narrative and the questions. The narrative is written in the "we" voice in order to promote unity about what we all have in common: our addiction and recovery. The questions are written in the individual "I" voice so that each member using these guides can personalize the work. The *Step Working Guides* is a companion piece to *It Works: How and Why*. Thorough discussion of each of the Twelve Steps is contained in that work. Additional information about NA recovery can be found in other NA literature. If we find that any of the terms used in this book are unfamiliar, we should feel free to make use of a dictionary.

These guides are meant to be used by NA members at any stage of recovery, whether it's our first time through the steps or we've been living with the steps as our guiding force for many years. This book is intentionally written to be relevant to newcomers and to help more experienced members develop a deeper understanding of the Twelve Steps. As NA grows in numbers, in diversity, and in strength and longevity of clean time, we need literature that will continue to serve the needs of the fellowship, literature that "grows" along with the fellowship.

However, as open and inclusive as we tried to be when writing these guides, we realized that we would never be able to write something that captured every member's experience with the steps. In fact, we wouldn't have tried to do that, even if we thought it were possible. This book contains guides to working the Twelve Steps toward recovery; it does not contain recovery itself. Recovery is ultimately found in each member's personal experience with working the steps. You can add to these guides, delete from them, or use them as they are. It's your choice.

There's probably only one inappropriate way to use these guides: alone. We can't overemphasize the importance of working with a sponsor in working the steps. In fact, in our fellowship, a sponsor is considered, first and foremost, a guide through the Twelve

Step Working Guides

Steps. If you haven't yet asked someone to sponsor you, please do so before beginning these guides.

Merely reading all the available information about any of the Twelve Steps will never be sufficient to bring about a true change in our lives and freedom from our disease. It's our goal to make the steps part of who we are. To do that, we have to work them. Hence, the *Step Working Guides*.

Like every piece of NA literature, this was written by addicts for addicts. We hope that every member who uses this book will be encouraged and inspired. We are grateful to have been given the opportunity to participate in this project. Thank you for allowing us to be of service.

WSC Literature Committee

*“We admitted that we were
powerless over our addiction,
that our lives had become
unmanageable.”*

—Step One

A "first" of anything is a beginning, and so it is with the steps: The First Step is the beginning of the recovery process. The healing starts here; we can't go any further until we've worked this step.

Some NA members "feel" their way through the First Step, by intuition; others choose to work Step One in a more systematic fashion. Our reasons for formally working Step One will vary from member to member. It may be that we're new to recovery, and we've just fought—and lost—an exhausting battle with drugs. It may be that we've been around awhile, abstinent from drugs, but we've discovered that our disease has become active in some other area of our lives, forcing us to face our powerlessness and the unmanageability of our lives once again. Not every act of growth is motivated by pain; it may just be time to cycle through the steps again, thus beginning the next stage of our never-ending journey of recovery.

Some of us find a measure of comfort in realizing that a *disease*, not a moral failing, has caused us to reach this bottom. Others don't really care what the cause has been—we just want out!

Whatever the case, it's time to do some step work: to engage in some concrete activity that will help us find more freedom from our addiction, whatever shape it is currently taking. Our hope is to internalize the principles of Step One, to deepen our surrender, to make the principles of acceptance, humility, willingness, honesty, and open-mindedness a fundamental part of who we are.

First, we must arrive at a point of surrender. There are many different ways to do this. For some of us, the road we traveled getting to the First Step was more than enough to convince us that unconditional surrender was our only option. Others of us start this process even though we're not entirely convinced that we're addicts or that we've really hit bottom. Only in working the First Step do we truly come to realize that we *are* addicts, that we *have* hit bottom, and that we must surrender.

Before we begin working the First Step, we must become abstinent—whatever it takes. If we're new in Narcotics Anonymous and our First Step is primarily about looking at the effects of drug addiction in our lives, we need to get clean. If we've been clean awhile and our First Step is about our powerlessness over some other behavior that's made our lives unmanageable, we need to find a way to stop the behavior so that our surrender isn't clouded by continued acting out.

The Disease of Addiction

What makes us addicts is the disease of addiction—not the drugs, not our behavior, but our disease. There is something within us that makes us unable to control our use of drugs. This same "something" also makes us prone to obsession and compulsion in other areas of our lives. How can we tell when our disease is active? When we become

trapped in obsessive, compulsive, self-centered routines, endless loops that lead nowhere but to physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional decay.

- What does "the disease of addiction" mean to me?
- Has my disease been active recently? In what way?
- What is it like when I'm obsessed with something? Does my thinking follow a pattern? Describe.
- When a thought occurs to me, do I immediately act on it without considering the consequences? In what other ways do I behave compulsively?
- How does the self-centered part of my disease affect my life and the lives of those around me?
- How has my disease affected me physically? Mentally? Spiritually? Emotionally?

Our addiction can manifest itself in a variety of ways. When we first come to Narcotics Anonymous, our problem will, of course, be drugs. Later on, we may find out that addiction is wreaking havoc in our lives in any number of ways.

- What is the specific way in which my addiction has been manifesting itself most recently?
- Have I been obsessed with a person, place, or thing? If so, how has that gotten in the way of my relationships with others? How else have I been affected mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally by this obsession?

Denial

Denial is the part of our disease that tells us we don't have a disease. When we are in denial, we are unable to see the reality of our addiction. We minimize its effect. We blame others, citing the too-high expectations of families, friends, employers. We compare ourselves with other addicts whose addiction seems "worse" than our own. We may blame one particular drug. If we have been abstinent from drugs for some time, we might compare the current manifestation of our addiction with our drug use, rationalizing that nothing we do today could possibly be as bad as *that* was! One of the easiest ways to tell that we are in denial is when we find ourselves giving plausible but untrue reasons for our behavior.

- Have I given plausible but untrue reasons for my behavior? What have they been?
- Have I compulsively acted on an obsession, and then acted as if I had actually *planned* to act that way? When were those times?
- How have I blamed other people for my behavior?
- How have I compared my addiction with others' addiction? Is my addiction "bad enough" if I don't compare it to anyone else's?

Step One

- Am I comparing a current manifestation of my addiction to the way my life was before I got clean? Am I plagued by the idea that I should know better?
- Have I been thinking that I have enough information about addiction and recovery to get my behavior under control before it gets out of hand?
- Am I avoiding action because I'm afraid I will be ashamed when I face the results of my addiction? Am I avoiding action because I'm worried about what others will think?

Hitting bottom: Despair and Isolation

Our addiction finally brings us to a place where we can no longer deny the nature of our problem. All the lies, all the rationalizations, all the illusions fall away as we stand face-to-face with what our lives have become. We realize we've been living without hope. We find we've become friendless or so completely disconnected that our relationships are a sham, a parody of love and intimacy. Though it may seem that all is lost when we find ourselves in this state, the truth is that we must pass through this place before we can embark upon our journey of recovery.

- What crisis brought me to recovery?
- What situation led me to formally work Step One?
- When did I first recognize my addiction as a problem? Did I try to correct it? If so, how? If not, why not?

Powerlessness

As addicts, we react to the word "powerless" in a variety of ways. Some of us recognize that a more accurate description of our situation simply could not exist, and admit our powerlessness with a sense of relief. Others recoil at the word, connecting it with weakness or believing it to indicate some kind of character deficiency. Understanding powerlessness—and how admitting our own powerlessness is essential to our recovery—will help us get over any negative feelings we may have about the concept.

We are powerless when the driving force in our life is beyond our control. Our addiction certainly qualifies as such an uncontrollable, driving force. We cannot moderate or control our drug use or other compulsive behaviors, even when they are causing us to lose the things that matter most to us. We cannot stop, even when to continue will surely result in irreparable physical damage. We find ourselves doing things that we would never do if it weren't for our addiction, things that make us shudder with shame when we think of them. We may even decide that we don't want to use, that we aren't going to use, and realize we are simply unable to stop when the opportunity presents itself.

We may have tried to abstain from drug use or other compulsive behaviors—perhaps with some success—for a period of time without a program, only to find that our untreated addiction eventually takes us right back to where we were before. In order to

work the First Step, we need to prove our own individual powerlessness to ourselves on a deep level.

- Over what, exactly, am I powerless?
- I've done things while acting out on my addiction that I would never do when focusing on recovery. What were they?
- What things have I done to maintain my addiction that went completely against all my beliefs and values?
- How does my personality change when I'm acting out on my addiction?
(For example: Do I become arrogant? Self-centered? Mean-tempered? Passive to the point where I can't protect myself? Manipulative? Whiny?)
- Do I manipulate other people to maintain my addiction? How?
- Have I tried to quit using and found that I couldn't? Have I quit using on my own and found that my life was so painful without drugs that my abstinence didn't last very long? What were these times like?
- How has my addiction caused me to hurt myself or others?

Unmanageability

The First Step asks us to admit two things: one, that we are powerless over our addiction; and two, that our lives have become unmanageable. Actually, we would be hard pressed to admit one and not the other. Our unmanageability is the outward evidence of our powerlessness. There are two general types of unmanageability: outward unmanageability, the kind that can be seen by others; and inner, or personal, unmanageability.

Outward unmanageability is often identified by such things as arrests, job losses, and family problems. Some of our members have been incarcerated. Some have never been able to sustain any kind of relationship for more than a few months. Some of us have been cut off from our families, asked never again to contact them.

Inner or personal unmanageability is often identified by unhealthy or untrue belief systems about ourselves, the world we live in, and the people in our lives. We may believe we're worthless. We may believe that the world revolves around us—not just that it *should*, but that it *does*. We may believe that it isn't really our job to take care of ourselves; someone else should do that. We may believe that the responsibilities the average person takes on as a matter of course are just too large a burden for us to bear. We may over- or underreact to events in our lives. Emotional volatility is often one of the most obvious ways in which we can identify personal unmanageability.

- What does unmanageability mean to me?
- Have I ever been arrested or had legal trouble as a result of my addiction?
Have I ever done anything I could have been arrested for if only I were caught?
What have those things been?

- What trouble have I had at work or school because of my addiction?
- What trouble have I had with my family as a result of my addiction?
- What trouble have I had with my friends as a result of my addiction?
- Do I insist on having my own way? What effect has my insistence had on my relationships?
- Do I consider the needs of others? What effect has my lack of consideration had on my relationships?
- Do I accept responsibility for my life and my actions?
Am I able to carry out my daily responsibilities without becoming overwhelmed?
How has this affected my life?
- Do I fall apart the minute things don't go according to plan?
How has this affected my life?
- Do I treat every challenge as a personal insult? How has this affected my life?
- Do I maintain a crisis mentality, responding to every situation with panic?
How has this affected my life?
- Do I ignore signs that something may be seriously wrong with my health or with my children, thinking things will work out somehow? Describe.
- When in real danger, have I ever been either indifferent to that danger or somehow unable to protect myself as a result of my addiction? Describe.
- Have I ever harmed someone as a result of my addiction? Describe.
- Do I have temper tantrums or react to my feelings in other ways that lower my self-respect or sense of dignity? Describe.
- Did I take drugs or act out on my addiction to change or suppress my feelings?
What was I trying to change or suppress?

Reservations

Reservations are places in our program that we have *reserved* for relapse. They may be built around the idea that we can retain a small measure of control, something like, "Okay, I accept that I can't control my using, but I can still sell drugs, can't I?" Or we may think we can remain friends with the people we used with or bought drugs from. We may think that certain parts of the program don't apply to us. We may think there's something we just can't face clean—a serious illness, for instance, or the death of a loved one—and plan to use if it ever happens. We may think that after we've accomplished some goal, made a certain amount of money, or been clean for a certain number of years, *then* we'll be able to control our using. Reservations are usually tucked away in the back of our minds; we are not fully conscious of them. It is essential that we expose any reservations we may have and cancel them—right here, right now.

- Have I accepted the full measure of my disease?
- Do I think I can still associate with the people connected with my addiction?
Can I still go to the places where I used? Do I think it's wise to keep drugs or paraphernalia around, just to "remind myself" or test my recovery? If so, why?
- Is there something I think I can't get through clean, some event that might happen that will be so painful that I'll have to use to survive the hurt?
- Do I think that with some amount of clean time, or with different life circumstances, I'd be able to control my using?
- What reservations am I still holding on to?

Surrender

There's a huge difference between resignation and surrender. Resignation is what we feel when we've realized we're addicts but haven't yet accepted recovery as the solution to our problem. Many of us found ourselves at this point long before coming to Narcotics Anonymous. We may have thought that it was our destiny to be addicts, to live and die in our addiction. Surrender, on the other hand, is what happens after we've accepted the First Step as something that is true for us *and* have accepted that recovery is the solution. We don't want our lives to be the way they have been. We don't want to keep feeling the way we've been feeling.

- What am I afraid of about the concept of surrender, if anything?
- What convinces me that I can't use successfully anymore?
- Do I accept that I'll never regain control, even after a long period of abstinence?
- Can I begin my recovery without a complete surrender?
- What would my life be like if I surrendered completely?
- Can I continue my recovery without complete surrender?

Spiritual Principles

In the First Step, we will focus on honesty, open-mindedness, willingness, humility, and acceptance. The practice of the principle of honesty from the First Step starts with admitting the truth about our addiction, and continues with the practice of honesty on a daily basis. When we say "I'm an addict" in a meeting, it may be the first truly honest thing we've said in a long time. We begin to be able to be honest with ourselves and, consequently, with other people.

- If I've been thinking about using or acting out on my addiction in some other way, have I shared it with my sponsor or told anyone else?

Step One

- Have I stayed in touch with the reality of my disease, no matter how long I've had freedom from active addiction?
- Have I noticed that, now that I don't have to cover up my addiction, I no longer need to lie like I did? Do I appreciate the freedom that goes along with that? In what ways have I begun to be honest in my recovery?

Practicing the principle of open-mindedness found in Step One mostly involves being ready to believe that there might be another way to live and being willing to try that way. It doesn't matter that we can't see every detail of what that way might be, or that it may be totally unlike anything we've heard about before; what matters is that we don't limit ourselves or our thinking. Sometimes we may hear NA members saying things that sound totally crazy to us, things like "surrender to win" or suggestions to pray for someone we resent. We demonstrate open-mindedness when we don't reject these things without having tried them.

- What have I heard in recovery that I have trouble believing?
Have I asked my sponsor, or the person I heard say it, to explain it to me?
- In what ways am I practicing open-mindedness?

The principle of willingness contained in the First Step can be practiced in a variety of ways. When we first begin to think about recovery, many of us either don't really believe it's possible for us or just don't understand how it will work, but we go ahead with the First Step anyway—and that's our first experience with willingness. Taking any action that will help our recovery shows willingness: going to meetings early and staying late, helping set up meetings, getting other NA members' phone numbers and calling them.

- Am I willing to follow my sponsor's direction?
- Am I willing to go to meetings regularly?
- Am I willing to give recovery my best effort? In what ways?

The principle of humility, so central to the First Step, is expressed most purely in our surrender. Humility is most easily identified as an acceptance of who we truly are—neither worse nor better than we believed we were when we were using, just *human*.

- Do I believe that I'm a monster who has poisoned the whole world with my addiction? Do I believe that my addiction is utterly inconsequential to the larger society around me? Or something in between?
- Do I have a sense of my relative importance within my circle of family and friends? In society as whole? What is that sense?
- How am I practicing the principle of humility in connection with this work on the First Step?

To practice the principle of acceptance, we must do more than merely admit that we're addicts. When we accept our addiction, we feel a profound inner change that is underscored by a rising sense of hope. We also begin to feel a sense of peace. We come to terms with our addiction, with our recovery, and with the meaning those two realities will come to have in our lives. We don't dread a future of meeting attendance, sponsor contact, and step work; instead, we begin to see recovery as a precious gift, and the work connected with it as no more trouble than other routines of life.

- Have I made peace with the fact that I'm an addict?
- Have I made peace with the things I'll have to do to stay clean?
- How is acceptance of my disease necessary for my continued recovery?

Moving on

As we get ready to go on to Step Two, we'll probably find ourselves wondering if we've worked Step One well enough. Are we sure it's time to move on? Have we spent as much time as others may have spent on this step? Have we truly gained an understanding of this step? Many of us have found it helpful to write about our understanding of each step as we prepare to move on.

- How do I know it's time to move on?
- What is my understanding of Step One?
- How has my prior knowledge and experience affected my work on this step?

We've come to a place where we see the results of our old way of life and accept that a new way is called for, but we probably don't yet see how rich with possibilities the life of recovery is. It may be enough just to have freedom from active addiction right now, but we will soon find that the void we have been filling with drugs or other obsessive and compulsive behaviors begs to be filled. Working the rest of the steps will fill that void. Next on our journey toward recovery is Step Two.

*“We came to believe that a Power
greater than ourselves could
restore us to sanity.”*

—Step Two

Step One strips us of our illusions about addiction; Step Two gives us hope for recovery. The Second Step tells us that what we found out about our addiction in the First Step is not the end of the story. The pain and insanity with which we have been living are unnecessary, says Step Two. They can be relieved and, in time, we will learn to live without them through working the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous.

The Second Step fills the void we feel when we've finished Step One. As we approach Step Two, we begin to consider that maybe, just maybe, there's a Power greater than ourselves—a Power capable of healing our hurt, calming our confusion, and restoring our sanity.

When we were new in the program, many of us were puzzled by this step's implication that we had been insane. From acknowledging our powerlessness to admitting our "insanity" seemed an awfully large leap. However, after being around the program for a while, we began to understand what this step was really about. We read the Basic Text and found that our insanity was defined there as "repeating the same mistakes and expecting different results." We could certainly relate to *that*! After all, how many times had we tried to get away with something we had *never* gotten away with before, each time telling ourselves, "It will be different this time?" Now, that's insane! As we live the principles of this step for many years, we discover how deep our insanity actually runs; we often find that the Basic Text definition just scratches the surface.

Some of us resisted this step because we thought it required us to be religious. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, in the NA program that requires a member to be religious. The idea that "anyone may join us, regardless of . . . religion or lack of religion" is fiercely defended by our fellowship. Our members strive to be inclusive in this regard and do not tolerate anything that compromises the unconditional right of all addicts to develop their own individual understanding of a Power greater than themselves. This is a spiritual, not religious, program.

The beauty of the Second Step is revealed when we begin to think about what our Higher Power can be. We are encouraged to choose a Power that is loving, caring, and—most importantly—able to restore us to sanity. The Second Step does not say, "We came to believe *in* a Power greater than ourselves." It says, "We came to believe *that* a Power greater than ourselves *could restore us to sanity*." The emphasis is not on who or what this Power is, but on what this Power can do for us. The group itself certainly qualifies as a Power greater than ourselves. So do the spiritual principles contained in the Twelve Steps. And, of course, so does the understanding any one of our individual members has of a Higher Power. As we stay clean and continue to work this step, we discover that no matter how long our addiction has gone on and how far our insanity has progressed, there's no limit to the ability of a Power greater than ourselves to restore our sanity.

Hope

The hope we get from working Step Two replaces the desperation with which we came into the program. Every time we had followed what we'd thought would be a path out of our addiction—medicine, religion, or psychiatry, for instance—we found they only took us so far; none of these was sufficient for us. As we ran out of options and exhausted our resources, we wondered if we'd ever find a solution to our dilemma, if there was anything in the world that *worked*. In fact, we may have been slightly suspicious when we first came to Narcotics Anonymous, wondering if this was just another method that wouldn't work, or that wouldn't work well enough for us to make a difference.

However, something remarkable occurred to us as we sat in our first few meetings. There were other addicts there who had used drugs just as we had, addicts who were now clean. We believed in them. We knew we could trust them. They knew the places we'd been to in our addiction—not just the using hangouts, not just the geographic locations, but the hangouts of horror and despair our spirits had visited each time we'd used. The recovering addicts we met in NA knew those places as well as we did because they had been there themselves.

It was when we realized that these other members—addicts like ourselves—were staying clean and finding freedom that most of us first experienced the feeling of hope. We may have been standing with a group of members after a meeting. We may have been listening to someone share a story just like our own. Most of us can recall that moment, even years later—and that moment comes to all of us.

Our hope is renewed throughout our recovery. Each time something new is revealed to us about our disease, the pain of that realization is accompanied by a surge of hope. No matter how painful the process of demolishing our denial may be, something else is being restored in its place within us. Even if we don't feel like we believe in anything, we do believe in the program. We believe that we can be restored to sanity, even in the most hopeless times, even in our sickest areas.

- What do I have hope about today?

Insanity

If we have any doubts about the need for a renewal of sanity in our lives, we're going to have trouble with this step. Reviewing our First Step should help us if we're having doubts. Now is the time to take a good look at our insanity.

- Did I believe I could control my using? What were some of my experiences with this, and how were my efforts unsuccessful?
- What things did I do that I can hardly believe I did when I look back at them?
Did I put myself in dangerous situations to get drugs?
Did I behave in ways of which I'm now ashamed? What were those situations like?

Step Two

- Did I make insane decisions as a result of my addiction?
Did I quit jobs, leave friendships and other relationships, or give up on achieving other goals for no reason other than that those things interfered with my using?
- Did I ever physically injure myself or someone else in my addiction?

Insanity is a loss of our perspective and our sense of proportion. For example, we may think that our personal problems are more important than anyone else's; in fact, we may not even be able to consider other people's needs at all. Small problems become major catastrophes. Our lives get out of balance. Some obvious examples of insane thinking are the belief that we can stay clean on our own, or the belief that using drugs was our only problem and that everything is fine now just because we're clean. In Narcotics Anonymous, insanity is often described as the belief that we can take something *outside* ourselves—drugs, power, sex, food—to fix what's wrong *inside* ourselves: our feelings.

- How have I overreacted or underreacted to things?
- How has my life been out of balance?
- In what ways does my insanity tell me that things outside myself can make me whole or solve all my problems? Using drugs? Compulsive gambling, eating, or sex seeking? Something else?
- Is part of my insanity the belief that the symptom of my addiction (using drugs or some other manifestation) is my only problem?

If we've been clean for a while, we may find that a whole new level of denial is making it difficult to see the insanity in our lives. Just as we did in the beginning of our recovery, we need to become familiar with the ways in which we have been insane. Many of us have found that our understanding of insanity goes further than the definition of insanity in the Basic Text. We make the same mistakes over and over again, even when we're fully aware of what the results will be. Perhaps we're hurting so bad that we don't care about the consequences, or we figure that acting on an obsession will somehow be worth the price.

- When we've acted on an obsession, even though we knew what the results would be, what were we feeling and thinking beforehand? What made us go ahead?

Coming to Believe

The discussion above provides several reasons why we may have trouble with this step. There may be others. It's important for us to identify and overcome any barriers that could prevent us from coming to believe.

- Do I have any fears about coming to believe? What are they?
- Do I have any other barriers that make it difficult for me to believe? What are they?
- What does the phrase "We came to believe..." mean to me?

As addicts, we're prone to wanting everything to happen instantly. But it's important to remember that Step Two is a process, not an event. Most of us don't just wake up one day and know that a Power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity. We gradually grow into this belief. Still, we don't have to just sit back and wait for our belief to grow on its own; we can help it along.

- Have I ever believed in anything for which I didn't have tangible evidence? What was that experience like?
- What experiences have I heard other recovering addicts share about the process of coming to believe? Have I tried any of them in my life?
- In what do I believe?
- How has my belief grown since I've been in recovery?

A Power Greater than Ourselves

Each one of us comes to recovery with a whole history of life experiences. That history will determine to a large degree the kind of understanding we develop of a Power greater than ourselves. In this step, we don't have to have a lot of specific ideas about the nature or identity of that Higher Power. That sort of understanding will come later. The kind of understanding of a Higher Power that's most important to find in the Second Step is an understanding that can *help* us. We're not concerned here with theological elegance or doctrinal adherence—we just want something that *works*.

How powerful does a Power greater than ourselves have to be? The answer to that question is simple. Our addiction as a negative power was, without a doubt, greater than we were. Our addiction led us down a path of insanity and caused us to act differently than we wanted to behave. We need something to combat that, something at least as powerful as our addiction.

- Do I have problems accepting that there is a Power or Powers greater than myself?
- What are some things that are more powerful than I am?
- Can a Power greater than myself help me stay clean? How?
- Can a Power greater than I am help me recover? How?

Some of us may have a very clear idea about the nature of a Power greater than ourselves, and there's absolutely nothing wrong with that. In fact, Step Two is the point at which many of us begin to form our first practical ideas about a Power greater than ourselves, if we haven't already. Many addicts have found it helpful to identify what a Power greater than ourselves is *not* before identifying what it *is*. In addition, looking at what a Power greater than ourselves can do for us may help us begin to discover more about that Power.

There are many, many understandings of a Power greater than ourselves that we can develop. We can think of it as the power of spiritual principles, the power of the NA Fellowship, "good orderly direction," or anything else of which we can conceive, as long as it is loving and caring and more powerful than we are. As a matter of fact, we don't have to have any *understanding* at all of a Power greater than ourselves to be able to use that Power to stay clean and seek recovery.

- What evidence do I have that a Higher Power is working in my life?
- What are the characteristics my Higher Power does *not* have?
- What are the characteristics my Higher Power has?

Restoration to Sanity

It Works: How and Why defines the term "restoration" as "changing to a point where addiction and its accompanying insanity are not controlling our lives." We find that just as our insanity was evident in our loss of perspective and sense of proportion, so we can see sanity in our lives when we begin developing a perspective that allows us to make better decisions. We find that we have choices about how to act. We begin to have the maturity and wisdom to slow down and consider all aspects of a situation before acting.

Naturally, our lives will change. Most of us have no trouble identifying the sanity in our lives when we compare our using with our early recovery, our early recovery with some time clean, and some time clean with long-term recovery. All of this is a process, and our need for a restoration to sanity will change over time.

When we're new in the program, being restored to sanity probably means not having to use anymore; when that happens, perhaps some of the insanity that is directly and obviously tied to our using will stop. We'll quit committing crimes to get drugs. We'll cease putting ourselves in certain degrading situations that serve no purpose but our using.

If we've been in recovery for some time, we may find that we have no trouble believing in a Power greater than ourselves that can help us stay clean, but we may not have considered what a restoration to sanity means to us beyond staying clean. As we grow in our recovery, it's very important that our idea of the meaning of "sanity" also grows.

- What are some things I consider examples of sanity?
- What changes in my thinking and behavior are necessary for my restoration to sanity?
- In what areas of my life do I need sanity now?
- How is restoration a process?
- How will working the rest of the steps help me in my restoration to sanity?
- How has sanity already been restored to me in my recovery?

Some of us may have unrealistic expectations about being restored to sanity. We may think that we'll never get angry again or that, as soon as we start to work this step, we will behave perfectly all the time and have no more trouble with obsessions, emotional turmoil, or imbalance in our lives. This description may seem extreme, but if we find ourselves disappointed with our personal growth in recovery or the amount of time it takes to be "restored to sanity," we may recognize some of our beliefs in this description. Most of us have found that we gain the most serenity by letting go of *any* expectations we may have about how our recovery is progressing.

- What expectations do I have about being restored to sanity?
Are they realistic or unrealistic?
- Are my realistic expectations about how my recovery is progressing being met or not? Do I understand that recovery happens over time, not overnight?
- Finding ourselves able to act sanely, even once, in a situation with which we were never able to deal successfully before is evidence of sanity. Have I had any experiences like that in my recovery? What were they?

Spiritual Principles

In the Second Step, we will focus on open-mindedness, willingness, faith, trust, and humility. The principle of open-mindedness that we find in the Second Step arises from the understanding that we can't recover alone, that we need some kind of help. It continues with opening our minds to believing that help is possible for us. It doesn't matter whether we have any idea of how this Power greater than ourselves is going to help, just that we believe it's possible.

- Why is having a closed mind harmful to my recovery?
- How am I demonstrating open-mindedness in my life today?
- In what ways has my life changed since I've been in recovery? Do I believe more change is possible?

Practicing the principle of willingness in the Second Step may begin simply. At first we may just go to meetings and listen to other recovering addicts share about their experiences with this step. Then we may begin applying what we hear to our own recovery. Of course, we ask our sponsor to guide us.

- What am I willing to do to be restored to sanity?
- Is there something I am now willing to do that I was previously unwilling to do?
What is it?

We can't just sit back and wait to feel a sense of faith when working Step Two. We have to work at it. One of the suggestions that has worked for many of us is to "act as if" we had faith. This doesn't mean that we should be dishonest with ourselves. We don't

Step Two

need to lie to our sponsor or anyone else about where we are with this step. We're not doing this to sound good or look good. "Acting as if" simply means living as though we believe that what we hope for will happen. In the Second Step, this would mean living as though we expect to be restored to sanity. There are a variety of ways this may work in our individual lives. Many members suggest that we can begin "acting as if" by going to meetings regularly and taking direction from our sponsor.

- What action have I been taking that demonstrates my faith?
- How has my faith grown?
- Have I been able to make plans, having faith that my addiction isn't going to get in the way?

Practicing the principle of trust may require overcoming a sense of fear about the process of being restored to sanity. Even if we've been clean only a short time, we've probably already experienced some emotional pain as we've grown in recovery. We may be afraid that there will be more pain. In one sense, we're right about this: There *will* be more pain. None of it, however, will be more than we can bear, and none of it has to be borne alone. If we can develop our sense of trust in the process of recovery and in a Power greater than ourselves, we can walk through the painful times in our recovery. We'll know that what's waiting on the other side will be more than just superficial happiness; it will be a fundamental transformation that will make our lives more satisfying on a deeper level.

- What fears do I have that are getting in the way of my trust?
- What do I need to do to let go of these fears?
- What action am I taking that demonstrates my trust in the process of recovery and a Power greater than myself?

The principle of humility springs from our acknowledgment that there is a Power greater than ourselves. It's a tremendous struggle for most of us to stop relying on our own thinking and begin to ask for help, but when we do, we have begun to practice the principle of humility found in the Second Step.

- Have I sought help from a Power greater than myself today?
How?
- Have I sought help from my sponsor, gone to meetings, and reached out to other recovering addicts? What were the results?

Moving on

As we get ready to go on to Step Three, we'll want to take a look at what we've gained by working Step Two. Writing about our understanding of each step as we prepare to move on helps us internalize the spiritual principles connected to it.

- What action can I take that will help me along in the process of coming to believe?
- What am I doing to work on overcoming any unrealistic expectations I may have about being restored to sanity?
- What is my understanding of Step Two?
- How has my prior knowledge and experience affected my work on this step?

As we move on to Step Three, a sense of hope is probably arising within our spirits. Even if we're not new in recovery, we've just reinforced our knowledge that recovery, growth, and change are not just possible but inevitable when we make the effort to work the steps. We can see the possibility of relief from the particular brand of insanity in which we've most recently been gripped by our addiction. We've probably already begun to experience some freedom. We're beginning to be released from the blind pursuit of our insanity. We've explored our insanity and have started to trust a Power greater than ourselves to relieve us from having to continue on the same path. We're beginning to be freed from our illusions. We no longer have to struggle to keep our addiction a secret or isolate ourselves to hide our insanity. We have seen how the program has worked for others, and we have discovered that it is beginning to work for us as well. Through our newfound faith, we achieve the willingness to move into action and work Step Three.

*“We made a decision to turn our
will and our lives over to the care
of God as we understood Him.”*

—Step Three

We've worked Steps One and Two with our sponsor—we've surrendered, and we've demonstrated our willingness to try something new. This has charged us with a strong sense of hope. But if we do not translate our hope into action right now, it will fade away, and we'll end up right back where we started. The action we need to take is working Step Three.

The central action in Step Three is a decision. The idea of making that decision may terrify us, especially when we look at what we're deciding to do in this step. Making a decision, any decision, is something most of us haven't done in a long time. We've had our decisions made for us—by our addiction, by the authorities, or just by default because we didn't want the responsibility of deciding anything for ourselves. When we add to this the concept of entrusting the care of our will and our lives to something that most of us *don't* understand at this point, we may just think this whole thing is beyond us and start looking for a shortcut or an easier way to work our programs. These thoughts are dangerous, for when we take shortcuts in our program, we short-circuit our recovery.

The Third Step decision may be too big to make in one leap. Our fears of the Third Step, and the dangerous thinking to which those fears lead, can be eased by breaking this step down into a series of smaller, separate hurdles. The Third Step is just one more piece of the path of recovery from our addiction. Making the Third Step decision doesn't necessarily mean that we must suddenly, completely change everything about the way we live our lives. Fundamental changes in our lives happen gradually as we work on our recovery, and all such changes require our participation. We don't have to be afraid that this step will do something to us that we're not ready for or won't like.

It is significant that this step suggests we turn our will and our lives over to the *care* of the God of our understanding. These words are particularly important. By working the Third Step, we are allowing someone or something to *care for* us, not control us or conduct our lives for us. This step does not suggest that we become mindless robots with no ability to live our own lives, nor does it allow those of us who find such irresponsibility attractive to indulge such an urge. Instead, we are making a simple decision to change direction, to stop rebelling at the natural and logical flow of events in our lives, to stop wearing ourselves out trying to make everything happen as if we were in charge of the world. We are accepting that a Power greater than ourselves will do a better job of caring for our will and our lives than we have. We are furthering the spiritual process of recovery by beginning to explore what we understand the word "God" to mean to us as individuals.

In this step, each one of us will have to come to some conclusions about what we think "God" means. Our understanding doesn't have to be complex or complete. It doesn't have to be like anyone else's. We may discover that we're very sure what God *isn't* for us, but not what God *is*, and that's okay. The only thing that is essential is that we begin a search that will allow us to further our understanding as our recovery continues. Our concept of God will grow as we grow in our recovery. Working the Third Step will help us discover what works best for us.

Making a Decision

As we've already discussed, many of us may find ourselves unnerved by the thought of making a big decision. We may feel intimidated or overwhelmed. We may fear the results or the implied commitment. We may think it's a once-and-for-all action and fear that we won't do it right or have the opportunity to do it over again. However, the decision to turn our will and lives over to the care of the God of our understanding is one we *can* make over and over again, daily if need be. In fact, we're likely to find that we must make this decision regularly, or risk losing our recovery because of complacency.

It is essential that we involve our hearts and spirits in this decision. Though the word "decision" sounds like something that takes place mostly in the mind, we need to do the work necessary to go beyond an intellectual understanding and internalize this choice.

- Why is making a decision central to working this step?
- Can I make this decision just for today? Do I have any fears or reservations about it? What are they?

We need to realize that making a decision without following it up with action is meaningless. For example, we can decide one morning to go somewhere and then sit down and not leave our homes for the rest of that day. Doing so would render our earlier decision meaningless, no more significant than any random thought we may have.

- What action have I taken to follow through on my decision?
- What areas of my life are difficult for me to turn over?
Why is it important that I turn them over anyway?

Self-will

Step Three is critical because we've acted on self-will for so long, abusing our right to make choices and decisions. So what exactly is self-will? Sometimes it's total withdrawal and isolation. We end up living a very lonely and self-absorbed existence. Sometimes self-will causes us to act to the exclusion of any considerations other than what we want. We ignore the needs and feelings of others. We barrel through, stampeding over anyone who questions our right to do whatever we want. We become tornadoes, whipping through the lives of family, friends, and even strangers, totally unconscious of the path of destruction we have left behind. If circumstances aren't to our liking, we try to change them by any means necessary to achieve our aims. We try to get our way at all costs. We are so busy aggressively pursuing our impulses that we completely lose touch with our conscience and with a Higher Power. To work this step, each one of us needs to identify the ways in which we have acted on self-will.

- How have I acted on self-will? What were my motives?
- How has acting on self-will affected my life?

Step Three

- How has my self-will affected others?

Surrendering our self-will doesn't mean we can't pursue goals or try to make changes in our lives and the world. It doesn't mean we have to passively accept injustices to ourselves or to people for whom we're responsible. We need to differentiate between destructive self-will and constructive action.

- Will pursuing my goals harm anyone? How?
- In the pursuit of what I want, is it likely that I will end up doing something that adversely affects myself or others? Explain.
- Will I have to compromise any of my principles to achieve this goal?
(For example: Will I have to be dishonest? Cruel? Disloyal?)

If we are new in the program and just beginning to work Step Three, we will probably end up wondering what God's will is for us, thinking that the step asks us to find this out. Actually, we don't formally focus our attention on seeking knowledge of our Higher Power's will for us until the Eleventh Step, but we do begin the process that will lead us to that point in Step Three.

God's will for us is something we will gradually come to know as we work the steps. At this point we can come to some very simple conclusions about our Higher Power's will for us that will serve us well for the time being. It is our Higher Power's will for us to stay clean. It is our Higher Power's will for us to do things that will help us stay clean, such as going to meetings and talking to our sponsor regularly.

- Describe the times when my will hasn't been enough. (For example, I couldn't stay clean on my own will.)
- What is the difference between my will and God's will?

At some point in our recovery, we may find that we have somehow shifted from trying to align our will with a Higher Power's to running on self-will. This happens so slowly and subtly that we hardly even notice. It seems as though we're especially vulnerable to self-will when things are going well. We cross the fine line that divides humble and honest pursuit of goals from subtle manipulation and forced results. We find ourselves going just a little too far in a discussion to convince someone that we are right. We find ourselves holding on to something just a little too long. We suddenly realize that we haven't contacted our sponsor in quite a while. We feel a quiet, almost subconscious discomfort that will alert us to this subtle shift away from recovery—if we listen.

- Have there been times in my recovery when I've found myself subtly taking back my will and my life? What alerted me? What have I done to recommit myself to the Third Step?

The God of Our Understanding

Before we delve deeply into the process of turning our will and our lives over to the care of the God of our understanding, we should work on overcoming any negative beliefs or unproductive preconceptions we may have about the word "God."

- Does the word "God," or even the concept itself, make me uncomfortable? What is the source of my discomfort?
- Have I ever believed that God caused horrible things to happen to me or was punishing me? What were those things?

Our Basic Text suggests that we choose an understanding of our Higher Power that is loving and caring and greater than ourselves. These simple guidelines can encompass as many understandings of God as there are NA members. They don't exclude anyone. If we understand the word "God" to mean the Power of the program, these guidelines fit. If we understand the word "God" to mean the spiritual principles of the program, these guidelines fit. If we understand the word "God" to mean a personal power or being with which we can communicate, these guidelines fit. It is essential that we begin exploring and developing our understanding. Our sponsor can help immeasurably in this process.

- What is my understanding of a Power greater than myself today?
- How is my Higher Power working in my life?

As important as it is to figure out what our Higher Power is to us, it is more important that we develop a relationship with whatever we understand that Power to be. We can do this in a variety of ways. First, we need to somehow communicate with our Higher Power. Some of us call this prayer, and some call it other things. This communication does not have to be formal, or even verbal.

Second, we need to be open to communication from our Higher Power. This may be done by paying attention to how we feel, our reactions, and what is going on inside and around us. Or we may have a personal routine that helps us connect with a Power greater than ourselves. It may be that our Higher Power speaks to us or helps us see the right thing to do through our fellow NA members.

Third, we need to allow ourselves to have feelings about the God of our understanding. We may get angry. We may feel love. We may feel frightened. We may feel grateful. It's okay to share the entire range of human emotion with our Higher Power. This allows us to feel closer to the Power upon which we rely and helps develop our trust in that Power.

- How do I communicate with my Higher Power?
- How does my Higher Power communicate with me?
- What feelings do I have about my Higher Power?

Step Three

As many of us stay clean for some time, we work on developing an understanding of God for ourselves. Our growing understanding reflects our experiences. We mature into an understanding of God that gives us peace and serenity. We trust our Higher Power and are optimistic about life. We begin to feel that our lives are touched by something beyond our comprehension, and we are glad and grateful that this is so.

Then something happens that challenges everything we believe about our Higher Power or makes us doubt the existence of that Power altogether. It may be a death, or an injustice, or a loss. Whatever it is, it leaves us feeling as though we've been kicked in the stomach. We just can't understand it.

Times like these are when we need our Higher Power the most, though we probably find ourselves instinctively drawing away. Our understanding of a Higher Power is about to undergo a dramatic change. We need to keep reaching out to our Higher Power, asking for acceptance if not understanding. We need to ask for strength to go on. Eventually we will reestablish our relationship with our Higher Power, although probably on different terms.

- Am I struggling with changing beliefs about the nature of my Higher Power?
Describe.
- Is my current concept of a Higher Power still working?
How might it need to change?

As our understanding of a Higher Power grows and evolves, we'll find that we react differently to what goes on in our lives. We may find ourselves able to courageously face situations that used to strike fear in our hearts. We may deal with frustrations more gracefully. We may find ourselves able to pause and think about a situation before acting. We'll probably be calmer, less compulsive, and more able to see beyond the immediacy of the moment.

Turning It Over

The order in which we prepare to surrender our will and our lives to the care of the God of our understanding is significant. Many of us have found that we actually follow the order in the step: First, we turn over our will; then, gradually, we turn over our lives. It seems that it's easier for us to grasp the destructive nature of our self-will and see that it must be surrendered; consequently, it's usually the first to go. Harder for us to grasp is the need to turn over our lives and the process of that surrender.

For us to be comfortable with allowing our Higher Power to care for our lives, we will have to develop some trust. We may have no trouble turning over our addiction, but want to remain in control of the rest of our lives. We may trust our Higher Power to care for our work lives, but not our relationships. We may trust our Higher Power to care for our partners, but not our children. We may trust our Higher Power with our safety, but

not our finances. Many of us have trouble letting go completely. We think we trust our Higher Power with certain areas of our lives, but immediately take back control the first time we get scared or things aren't going the way we think they should. It's necessary for us to examine our progress in turning it over.

- What does "to the care of" mean to me?
- What does it mean for me to turn my will and my life over to the care of the God of my understanding?
- How might my life be changed if I make the decision to turn it over to my Higher Power's care?
- How do I allow my Higher Power to work in my life?
- How does my Higher Power care for my will and my life?
- Have there been times when I have been unable to let go and trust God to care for the outcome of a particular situation? Describe.
- Have there been times when I *have* been able to let go and trust God for the outcome? Describe.

To turn our will and our lives over to the care of our Higher Power, we must take some kind of action. Many of us find that it works best for us to make some formal declaration on a regular basis. We may want to use the following quote from our Basic Text: "Take my will and my life. Guide me in my recovery. Show me how to live." This seems to capture the essence of Step Three for many of us. However, we can certainly feel free to find our own words, or to find a more informal way of taking action. Many of us believe that every day we abstain from using, or take suggestions from our sponsor, we are taking practical action on our decision to turn our will and lives over to the care of our Higher Power.

- How do I take action to turn it over? Are there any words I say regularly? What are they?

Spiritual Principles

In considering the spiritual principles intrinsic to Step Three, we will focus first on surrender and willingness. Then we will look at how hope translates into faith and trust. Finally, we will see how the principle of commitment is tied to the Third Step.

Practicing the principle of surrender is easy for us when everything is going along as we'd like—we think. Actually, when things are going smoothly, it's more likely that we are being lulled into a belief that we're in charge, which doesn't require much "surrender." Keeping the principle of surrender to the care of the God of our understanding alive in our spirits is essential, even when things are going well.

Step Three

- What am I doing to reinforce my decision to allow my Higher Power to care for my will and my life?
- How does the Third Step allow me to build on the surrender I've developed in Steps One and Two?

We usually feel most willing immediately following a surrender. Willingness often comes in the wake of despair or a struggle for control. We can practice the principle of willingness, though, before it becomes necessary and possibly save ourselves some pain.

- In what ways have I demonstrated willingness in my recovery so far?
- Am I fighting anything in my recovery? What do I think would happen if I became willing to let recovery prevail in that area of my life?

There is a spiritual progression from hope to faith to trust in the Third Step. As we begin Step Three, we carry with us the sense of hope that was born in us as we worked the Second Step. Hope springs from the knowledge that our life is full of possibilities—there are no hard certainties yet, just the first whispers of anticipation that we just may be able to fulfill our heart's deepest desires. Lingered doubts fade as hope becomes faith. Faith propels us forward into action; we actually do the work that those we have faith in are telling us is necessary if we are to achieve what we want. In the Third Step, faith gives us the capacity to actually make a decision and carry that decision into action. Trust comes into play after faith has been applied. We have probably made significant progress toward fulfilling our goals; now we have evidence that we can influence the course of our lives through taking positive action.

- How have hope, faith, and trust become positive forces in my life?
- What further action can I take to apply the principles of hope, faith, and trust in my recovery?
- What evidence do I have that I can trust confidently in my recovery?

The principle of commitment is the culmination of the spiritual process of Step Three. Making the decision to "turn it over," over and over again, even when our decision doesn't seem to be having any positive effect, is what this step is all about. We can practice the spiritual principle of commitment by reaffirming our decision on a regular basis and by continuing to take action that gives our decision substance and meaning—for instance, working the rest of the steps.

- What have I done recently that demonstrates my commitment to recovery and to working a program? (For example: Have I taken a service position in NA? Have I agreed to sponsor another recovering addict? Have I continued to go to meetings no matter what I was feeling about them? Have I continued to work with my sponsor even after he or she told me an unpleasant truth or gave me some direction I didn't want to follow? Did I follow that direction?)

Moving on

As we get ready to go on to Step Four, we'll want to take a look at what we've gained by working Step Three. Writing about our understanding of each step as we prepare to move on helps us internalize the spiritual principles connected to it.

- Do I have any reservations about my decision to turn my will and my life over to God's care?
- Do I feel that I am now ready to turn it over?
- How does my surrender in the First Step help me in the Third Step?
- What action do I plan to take to follow through on my decision?
How does working the remainder of the steps fit into this?

We wind up our work on Step Three with an increase in our level of freedom. If we've been thorough with this step, we're profoundly relieved to realize that the world will go along just fine without our intervention. The responsibility of running everything is a huge burden, and we're happy to lay it down. We may feel comforted that a loving God is caring for our will and our lives, letting us know in subtle ways that the path we're on is the right one. We've seen our old ideas for what they were, and we're willing to let go of them and allow change to happen in our lives. We may even find that we're willing to take some risks we never had the courage to take before, because we're secure in the knowledge of our Higher Power's care for us.

Some people pause before making major decisions and ground themselves in their own spirituality. We look to the source of our strength, invite our Higher Power to work in our lives, and move forward once we're sure we're on the right track. Now we need to take another step along the path of recovery, a step that makes our Third Step decision real. It's time to make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

*"We made a searching
and fearless moral inventory
of ourselves."*

—Step Four

Most of us came to Narcotics Anonymous because we wanted to stop something—using drugs. We probably didn't put much thought into what we were starting—a program of recovery—by coming to NA. But if we haven't taken a look at what we're getting out of this program, now might be a good time to pause and think about it.

First, we should ask ourselves what we want out of recovery. Most of us answer this question by saying that we just want to be comfortable, or happy, or serene. We just want to like ourselves. But how can we like ourselves when we don't even know who we are?

The Fourth Step gives us the means to begin finding out who we are, the information we'll need to begin to like ourselves and get those other things we expect from the program—comfort, happiness, serenity.

The Fourth Step heralds a new era in our recovery. Steps Four through Nine can be thought of as a process within a process. We will use the information we find in working the Fourth Step to work our Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Steps. This process is meant to be done over and over again in recovery.

There is an analogy for this process that is particularly apt. We can think of ourselves as an onion. Each time we begin a Fourth Step, we are peeling away a layer of the onion and getting closer to the core. Each layer of the onion represents another layer of denial, the disease of addiction, our character defects, and the harm we've caused. The core represents the pure and healthy spirit that lies at the center of each one of us. It is our goal in recovery to have a spiritual awakening, and we get closer to that by beginning this process. Our spirits awaken a little more each time we go through it.

The Fourth Step is a method for learning about ourselves, and it is as much about finding our character assets as it is about identifying the exact nature of our wrongs. The inventory process is also an avenue to freedom. We have been prohibited from being free for so long—probably all our lives. Many of us have discovered, as we worked the Fourth Step, that our problems didn't begin the first time we took drugs, but long before, when the seeds of our addiction were actually planted. We may have felt isolated and different long before we took drugs. In fact, the way we felt and the forces that drove us are completely enmeshed with our addiction; it was our desire to change the way we felt and to subdue those forces that led us to take our first drug. Our inventory will lay bare the unresolved pain and conflicts in our past so that we are no longer at their mercy. We'll have a choice. We'll have achieved a measure of freedom.

This portion of the Step Working Guides actually has two distinct sections. The first helps us prepare to work the Fourth Step by guiding us through an exploration of our motives for working this step and what this step means to us. The second part is a guide for actually taking a searching and fearless moral inventory.

Motivation

Though our motivation for working the Fourth Step is not as important as actually working the Fourth Step, we may find it helpful to examine and dispel any reservations we have about this step, and think about some of the benefits we will get as a result of working this step.

- Do I have any reservations about working this step?
What are they?
- What are some of the benefits that could come from making a searching and fearless moral inventory of myself?
- Why shouldn't I procrastinate about working this step?
- What are the benefits of not procrastinating?

Searching and Fearless

This is the phrase that has most puzzled many of us. We probably understand what "searching" means, but what about "fearless"? How can we get over all our fear? That might take years, we think; but we need to work on this inventory right away.

Taking a fearless inventory means going ahead despite our fear. It means having the courage to take this action no matter how we feel about it. It means having the courage to be honest, even when we're cringing inside and swearing that we'll take what we're writing to the grave. It means having the determination to be thorough, even when it seems that we've written enough. It means having the faith to trust this process and trust our Higher Power to give us whatever quality we need to walk through the process.

Let's face it: This step does involve a lot of work. But we can take heart from the fact that there's rarely a deadline on completing this step. We can do it in manageable sections, a little at a time, until we are done. The only thing that's important is that we work on it consistently.

There are times when our clean time can actually work against us: when we fail to acknowledge our fear of taking an inventory. Many of us who have worked the Fourth Step numerous times and know it's ultimately one of the most loving things we can do for ourselves may still find ourselves avoiding this task. We may think that since we know how good this process is, we shouldn't have any fear of it. But we need to give ourselves permission to be afraid, if that's what we feel.

We may also have fears that stem from our previous experiences with the Fourth Step. We know that an inventory means change in our lives. We know that if our inventories reveal destructive patterns, we can't continue to practice the same behaviors without a great deal of pain. Sometimes this means having to let go of something in our lives—some behavior we think we can't survive without; a relationship; or perhaps a resentment we've nursed so carefully that it's actually become, in a sick way, a source of

reassurance and comfort. The fear of letting go of something we've come to depend on, no matter how much we've begun to suspect it isn't good for us, is an absolutely valid fear. We just can't let it stop us. We have to face it and act with courage.

We may also have to overcome a barrier that grows from an unwillingness to reveal more of our disease. Many of our members with clean time have shared that an inventory taken in later recovery revealed that their addiction had spread its tentacles so completely through their lives that virtually no area was left untouched. This realization is often initially met with feelings of dismay and perplexity. We wonder how we could still be so sick. Hasn't all this effort in recovery resulted in more than surface healing?

Of course it has. We just need some time to remember that. Our sponsor will be happy to remind us. After we've had time to accept what our inventories are revealing, we feel a sense of hope rising to replace the feelings of dismay. After all, an inventory always initiates a process of change and freedom. Why shouldn't it this time, too?

- Am I afraid of working this step? What is my fear?
- What does it mean to me to be searching and fearless?
- Am I working with my sponsor and talking to other addicts? What other action am I taking to reassure myself that I can handle whatever is revealed in this inventory?

A Moral Inventory

Many of us have a multitude of unpleasant associations connected to the word "moral." It may conjure up memories of an overly rigid code of behavior we were expected to adhere to. It may make us think of people we consider "moral," people we think of as better than ourselves. Hearing this word may also awaken our tendency toward rebellion against society's morals and our resentment of authorities who were never satisfied with our morality. Whether any of this is true for us, as individuals, is a matter to be determined by us, as individuals. If any of the preceding seems to fit, we can alleviate our discomfort with the word "moral" by thinking about it in a different way.

In Narcotics Anonymous, in this step, the word "moral" has nothing to do with specific codes of behavior, society's norms, or the judgment of some authority figure. A moral inventory is something we can use to discover our own individual morality, our own values and principles. We don't have to relate them in any way to the values and principles of others.

- Am I disturbed by the word "moral"? Why?
- Am I disturbed by thinking about society's expectations and afraid that I can't, won't, and will never be able to conform to them?
- What values and principles are important to me?

An Inventory of Ourselves

The Fourth Step asks us to take an inventory of ourselves, not of other people. Yet when we begin writing and looking at our resentments, fears, behavior, beliefs, and secrets, we will find that most of these are connected to another person, or sometimes to an organization or institution. It's important to understand that we are free to write whatever we need to about others, as long as it leads us to finding our part in the situation. In fact, most of us can't separate our part from their part at first. Our sponsor will help us with this.

Spiritual Principles

In the Fourth Step, we will call on all of the spiritual principles we began to practice in the first three steps. First of all, we have to be willing to work a Fourth Step. We'll need to be meticulously honest with ourselves, thinking about everything we write down and asking ourselves if it's true or not. We'll need to be courageous enough to face our fear and walk through it. Last, but not least, our faith and trust will carry us through when we're facing a difficult moment and feel like giving up.

- How is my decision to work Step Four a demonstration of courage?
Trust? Faith? Honesty? Willingness?

The Inventory

Get a notebook or whatever means of recording your inventory you and your sponsor have agreed is acceptable. Get comfortable. Remove any distractions from the place where you plan to work on your inventory. Pray for the ability to be searching, fearless, and thorough. Don't forget to stay in touch with your sponsor throughout this process. Finally, feel free to go beyond what's asked in the following questions. Anything you think of is inventory material.

Resentments

We have resentments when we re-feel old feelings, when we are unable to let go, when we cannot forgive and forget something that has upset us. We list our resentments in the Fourth Step for a number of reasons. First, doing so will help us let go of old anger that is affecting our lives today. Second, exploring our resentments will help us identify the ways in which we set ourselves up to be disappointed in others, especially when our expectations were too high. Finally, making a list of our resentments will reveal patterns that kept us trapped in a cycle of anger, or self-pity, or both.

- What people do I resent? Explain the situations that led to the resentment.
- What institutions (school, government, religious, correctional, civic) do I resent?

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Explain the situations that led to the resentment.

- What was my motivation, or what did I believe, that led me to act as I did in these situations?
- How has my dishonesty contributed to my resentments?
- How has my inability or unwillingness to experience certain feelings led me to develop resentments?
- How has my behavior contributed to my resentments?
- Am I afraid of looking at my part in the situations that caused my resentments? Why?
- How have my resentments affected my relationships with myself, with others, and with a Higher Power?
- What recurring themes do I notice in my resentments?

Feelings

We want to examine our feelings for much the same reason that we want to examine our resentments: It will help us discover our part in our own lives. In addition, most of us have forgotten how to feel by the time we get clean. Even if we've been around awhile, we're still uncovering new information about the ways we've shut down our feelings.

- How do I identify my individual feelings?
- What feelings do I have the most trouble allowing myself to feel?
- Why have I tried to shut off my feelings?
- What means have I used to deny how I really felt?
- Who or what triggered a feeling? What was the feeling? What were the situations? What was my part in each situation?
- What was my motivation, or what did I believe, that led me to act as I did in these situations?
- What do I do with my feelings once I've identified them?

Guilt, Shame

There are actually two types of guilt or shame: one real, one imagined. The first grows directly out of our conscience—we feel guilty because we've done something that goes against our principles, or we harmed someone and feel shame over it. Imagined guilt results from any number of situations that are not our fault, situations we had no part in creating. We need to look at our guilt and shame so that we can separate these situations. We need to own what is truly ours and let go of what is not.

- Who or what do I feel guilty or ashamed about? Explain the situations that led to these feelings.
- Which of these situations have caused me to feel shame, though I had no part in creating them?
- In the situations I did have a part in, what was my motivation, or what did I believe, that led me to act as I did?
- How has my behavior contributed to my guilt and shame?

Fear

If we could look at the disease of addiction stripped of its primary symptoms—that is, apart from drug use or other compulsive behavior—and without its most obvious characteristics, we would find a swamp of self-centered fear. We're afraid of being hurt, or maybe of just having to feel too intensely, so we live a sort of half-life, going through the motions of living but never being fully alive. We're afraid of everything that might make us feel, so we isolate and withdraw. We're afraid that people won't like us, so we use drugs to be more comfortable with ourselves. We're afraid we'll get caught at something and have to pay a price, so we lie or cheat or hurt others to protect ourselves. We're afraid of being alone, so we use and exploit others to avoid feeling lonely or rejected or abandoned. We're afraid we won't have enough—of anything—so we selfishly pursue what we want, not caring about the harm we cause in the process. Sometimes, if we've gained things we care about in recovery, we're afraid we'll lose what we have, and so we begin compromising our principles to protect it. Self-centered, self-seeking fear—we need to uproot it so it no longer has the power to destroy.

- Who or what do I fear? Why?
- What have I done to cover my fear?
- How have I responded negatively or destructively to my fear?
- What do I most fear looking at and exposing about myself?
What do I think will happen if I do?
- How have I cheated myself because of my fear?

Relationships

We need to write about our relationships in the Fourth Step—all of our relationships, not just the romantic ones—so that we can find out where our choices, beliefs, and behaviors have resulted in unhealthy or destructive relationships. We need to look at our relationships with relatives, spouses or partners, friends and former friends, co-workers and former co-workers, neighbors, people from school, people from clubs and civic organizations and the organizations themselves, authority figures such as the police, institutions,

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and anyone or anything else we can possibly think of. We should also examine our relationship with a Higher Power. We may be tempted to skip the relationships that didn't last long—a one-night sexual involvement, for instance, or perhaps an argument with a teacher whose class we then dropped. But these relationships are important, too. If we think of it or have feelings about it, it's inventory material.

- What conflicts in my personality make it difficult for me to maintain friendships and/or romantic relationships?
- How has my fear of being hurt affected my friendships and romantic relationships?
- How have I sacrificed platonic friendships in favor of romantic relationships?
- In what ways did I compulsively seek relationships?
- In my relationships with family, do I sometimes feel as though we're locked into repeating the same patterns over and over without any hope of change? What are those patterns? What is my part in perpetuating them?
- How have I avoided intimacy with my friends, partners or spouses, and family?
- Have I had problems making commitments? Describe.
- Have I ever destroyed a relationship because I believed I was going to get hurt anyway so I should get out before that could happen? Describe.
- To what degree do I consider the feelings of others in my relationships? Equal to my own? More important than my own? Of minor importance? Not at all?
- Have I felt like a victim in any of my relationships? (Note: This question is focused on uncovering how we set ourselves up to be victims or how too-high expectations contributed to our being disappointed in people, *not* on listing instances where we were actually abused.) Describe.
- What have my relationships with my neighbors been like? Do I notice any patterns appearing that carried through no matter where I lived?
- How do I feel about the people with and for whom I've worked? How have my thinking, beliefs, and behavior caused problems for me at work?
- How do I feel about the people I went to school with (both in childhood and currently)? Did I feel less than or better than the other students? Did I believe I had to compete for attention from the instructor? Did I respect authority figures or rebel against them?
- Have I ever joined any clubs or membership organizations? (Hint: NA is a membership organization.) How did I feel about the other people in the club or organization? Have I made friends in these organizations? Have I joined clubs with high expectations, only to quit in a short time? What were my expectations, and why weren't they fulfilled? What was my part in these situations?

- Have I ever been in a mental hospital or prison or otherwise been held against my will? What effect has that had on my personality? What were my interactions with the authorities like? Did I follow the rules? Did I ever break the rules and then resent the authorities when I got caught?
- Did early experiences with trust and intimacy hurt me and cause me to withdraw? Describe.
- Have I ever let a relationship go even when the potential existed to resolve conflicts and work through problems? Why?
- Did I become a different person depending on who I was around? Describe.
- Have I discovered things about my personality (perhaps in previous inventories) that I didn't like, and then found myself overcompensating for that behavior? (For instance, we may have uncovered a pattern of immature dependence on others and then overcompensated for this by becoming overly self-sufficient.) Describe.
- What defects are most often at play in my relationships (dishonesty, selfishness, control, manipulation, etc.)?
- How can I change my behavior so that I can begin having healthy relationships?
- Have I had any kind of a relationship with a Higher Power? How has this changed in my lifetime? What kind of a relationship do I have with my Higher Power now?

Sex

This is a very uncomfortable area for most of us. In fact, we may be tempted to stop here, thinking, "Okay, this has gone far enough! There's no way I'm cataloging my sexual behavior!" But we have to get over such unwillingness quickly. Thinking about the reason why we need to do this should help. As it says in *It Works: How and Why*, "We want to be at peace with our own sexuality." That's why we need to include our sexual beliefs and behaviors in our inventories. It's important to remind ourselves at this point that we are not taking our inventory to compare ourselves with what we think is "normal" for others, but only to identify our own values, principles, and morals.

- How was my sexual behavior based in selfishness?
- Have I confused sex with love? What were the results of acting on that confusion?
- How have I used sex to try to avoid loneliness or fill a spiritual void?
- In what ways did I compulsively seek or avoid sex?
- Have any of my sexual practices left me feeling ashamed and guilty? What were they? Why did I feel that way?
- Have any of my sexual practices hurt myself or others?
- Am I comfortable with my sexuality? If not, why not?

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- Am I comfortable with others' sexuality? If not, why not?
- Is sex a prerequisite in all or most of my relationships?
- What does a healthy relationship mean to me?

Abuse

We must exercise extreme caution before beginning this section. In fact, we may need to postpone this section to a later time in our recovery. We should utilize all the resources at hand to make the decision about whether to begin this section now: our own sense of whether or not we're ready to withstand the pain this work will cause us, discussion with our sponsor, and prayer. Perhaps our sponsor will be able to help us through this, or we may need to seek additional help.

If we do decide to go ahead with this section, we should be aware that working on this area of our Fourth Step will probably be the most painful work we'll do in recovery. Recording the times when we were neglected or hurt by the people who were supposed to love and protect us is certain to cause some of the most painful feelings we will ever have to go through. It is important to do so when we're ready, however. As long as we keep the pain wrapped up inside us, a secret, it may cause us to act in ways we don't want, or it can contribute to a negative self-image or other destructive beliefs. Getting the truth out begins a process that can lead to the relief of our pain. We were not to blame.

- Have I ever been abused? By whom? What feelings did I or do I now have about it?
- Has being abused affected my relationships with others?
How?
- If I have felt victimized for much of life because of being abused in childhood, what steps can I take to be restored to spiritual wholeness? Can my Higher Power help?
How?

It is also possible that we have physically, mentally, or verbally abused others. Re-counting these times is bound to cause us to feel a great deal of shame. We cannot afford to let that shame become despair. It is important that we face our behavior, accept responsibility for it, and work to change it. Writing about it here is the first step toward doing that. Working the rest of the steps will help us make amends for what we've done to others.

- Have I ever abused anyone? Who and how?
- What was I feeling and thinking right before I caused the harm?
- Did I blame my victim or make excuses for my behavior? Describe.
- Do I trust my Higher Power to work in my life and provide me with what I need so I don't have to harm anyone again? Am I willing to live with the painful feelings until they are changed through working the steps?

Assets

Most of the preceding questions have been directed at helping us identify the exact nature of our wrongs, information we'll need for the Fifth Step. It's also important that we take a look at things that we've done right or that have had a positive impact on ourselves and others. We want to do this for a couple of reasons. First, we want to have a complete picture of ourselves from working the Fourth Step, not a one-sided picture. Second, we want to know what character traits and behaviors we want more of in our lives.

- What qualities do I have that I like? That others like? That work well for me?
- How have I shown concern for myself and others?
- Which spiritual principles am I practicing in my life?
How has doing so changed my life?
- How has my faith and trust in a Higher Power grown?
- What is my relationship with my sponsor based on?
How do I see that positive experience translating into other relationships?
- What goals have I accomplished? Do I have other goals I am taking action to reach? What are they, and what action am I taking?
- What are my values? Which ones am I committed to living by, and how?
- How am I showing my gratitude for my recovery?

Secrets

Before we finish this Fourth Step, we should stop and reflect: Is there anything we've missed, either intentionally or not? Is there something we think is so bad that we just can't possibly include it in our inventory? If so, we should be reassured by the fact that a multitude of NA members have worked this step, and there has never yet been a situation in anyone's Fourth Step that was so unique that we had to create a new term to describe it. Keeping secrets is threatening to our recovery. As long as we are keeping a secret, we are actually building a reservation in our program.

- Are there any secrets that I haven't written about yet? What are they?

Another question we should ask ourselves now is, is there anything in this inventory that is either an exaggeration of what actually happened or something that's not true at all? Almost all of us came to NA and had trouble separating fact from fiction in our own lives. Most of us had accumulated "war stories" that were so embroidered that they may have contained only a fraction of truth. We made them up because we wanted to impress people. We didn't think we had anything to feel good about that was true, so we made up lies in an attempt to build ourselves up. But we don't have to do that anymore. We're building true self-worth in the process of working Step Four, not false self-worth based on some phony image. Now is the time to tell the truth about ourselves.

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- Is there anything in this inventory that isn't true, or are there any stories I've told over and over again that aren't true?

Moving on

Finishing a Fourth Step is many things—may be a letdown, may be exhilarating, may be uncomfortable. However we feel otherwise, we should definitely feel good about what we've accomplished. The work we've done in this step will provide the foundation for the work we'll do in Steps Five through Nine. Now is the time to contact our sponsor and make arrangements to work Step Five.

*“We admitted to God,
to ourselves, and to another
human being the exact nature
of our wrongs.”*

—Step Five

Our Basic Text tells us that "Step Five is not simply a reading of Step Four." Yet we know that reading our Fourth Step to another human being is certainly *part of* Step Five. So what's the rest, the part that's more than simply a reading.

It's the *admission* we make—to God, to ourselves, and to another human being—that brings about the spiritual growth connected with this step. We've had some experience with making admissions already. We've admitted we have a disease; we've admitted we need help; we've admitted there's a Power that could help us. Drawing on our experience with these admissions will help us in Step Five.

Many of us finished our Fourth Step with a sense of relief, thinking that the really hard part was over, only to realize that we still had the Fifth Step to do. That's when the fear set in.

Some of us were afraid that our sponsor would reject or judge us. Others hesitated because we didn't want to bother our sponsor with so much. We weren't sure we trusted our sponsor to keep our secrets.

We may have been concerned about what the inventory might reveal. There might be something hidden from us that our sponsor would spot immediately—and it probably wouldn't be anything good. Some of us were afraid of having to re-feel old feelings, and wondered if there was really any benefit to stirring up the past. Some of us felt that as long as we hadn't actually spoken our inventories out loud, the contents wouldn't be quite real.

If we consider all our feelings about the Fifth Step, we may find that we are also motivated to continue this process by a desire for more recovery. We think about the people we know who have worked this step. We're struck by their genuineness and by their ability to connect with others. They aren't always talking about themselves. They're asking about others, and they're truly interested in knowing the answer. And if we ask them how they learned so much about relationships with others, they'll probably tell us that they began learning when they worked Step Five.

Many of us, having worked the Fourth and Fifth Steps before, knew that this process always resulted in change—in other words, we'd have to stop behaving the same old way! We may not have been entirely sure we wanted that. On the other hand, many of us knew we had to change, but were afraid we couldn't.

Two things we need to begin working Step Five are courage and a sense of trust in the process of recovery. If we have both these things, we'll be able to work through more specific fears and go through with the admissions we need to make in this step.

Facing Fears

Any of the fears we've talked about here might be ours, or we might have other fears that plague us. It's essential that we know what our fears are and move forward in spite of them so that we're able to continue with our recovery.

- What reservations do I have about working the Fifth Step?
- Do I have any fears at this point? What are they?

No matter what our fears stem from, most of our members have done pretty much the same things to deal with them: We pray for courage and willingness, read the section from *It Works: How and Why* on the Fifth Step, and seek reassurance from other members. Many of us have had the experience of going to step study meetings and finding that, coincidentally, the topic always seems to be Step Four or Five. If we make the effort to share what we're going through, we're sure to get the support we need from other members. Calling upon the spiritual resources we have developed through working the previous steps will allow us to proceed with our Fifth Step.

- What am I doing to work through my fears about doing a Fifth Step?
- How has working the first four steps prepared me to work the Fifth Step?

Admitted to God

The chapter on Step Five in *It Works: How and Why* answers the question about why we must admit the exact nature of our wrongs to God in addition to admitting them to ourselves and another human being. In NA, we experience a way of life where the spiritual meets the everyday, where the ordinary meets the extraordinary. When we admit the exact nature of our wrongs to the God of our understanding, our admission becomes more meaningful.

How we make our admission to the God of our understanding depends on the specifics of our understanding. Some make a formal admission to God apart from the admissions we make to ourselves and another human being. Others acknowledge or invite the presence of a Higher Power in some way before going over the inventory with their sponsor. Those of us whose Higher Power is the spiritual principles of recovery or the power of the NA Fellowship may have to explore different methods of working this portion of the Fifth Step. Our sponsor can help with this process. Whatever we do is okay as long as we are aware that we are also making our admission to a Higher Power.

- How will I include the God of my understanding in my Fifth Step?
- How is my Third Step decision reaffirmed by working the Fifth Step?

To Ourselves

When we were using, most of us probably had people telling us we had a drug problem and should get some help. Their comments didn't really matter to us. Or even if they did matter, it wasn't enough to stop us from using. Not until we admitted our addiction to ourselves and surrendered to the NA program were we able to stop using. It's just the same with the admission we make in the Fifth Step. We can have everyone from our spouse to our employer to our sponsor telling us what we're doing that's working against

us, but until we admit to our own innermost selves the exact nature of our wrongs, we're not likely to have the willingness or the ability to choose another way.

- Can I acknowledge and accept the exact nature of my wrongs?
- How will making this admission change the direction of my life?

And to another Human Being

As addicts, one of the biggest problems we have is telling the difference between our responsibility and the responsibilities of others. We blame ourselves for catastrophes over which we have no control. Conversely, we're often in complete denial about how we have hurt ourselves and others. We overdramatize minor troubles, and we shrug off major problems we really should be taking a look at. If we're not sure what the exact nature of our wrongs is when we begin our Fifth Step, we'll know by the time we finish—because of making our admissions to another human being. What we can't see, our listener can, and he or she will help us sort out what we need to accept as our responsibility and what we don't.

Most of us asked someone to be our sponsor before we began formally working the steps, and have been developing a relationship with that person ever since. For most of us, our sponsor will be the "another human being" we choose to hear our Fifth Step. He or she will help us separate the things that were not our responsibility from the things that were. The relationship we have been building with our sponsor will give us the trust we need to have in him or her. The therapeutic value of one addict helping another is often powerfully demonstrated when our sponsor shares details from his or her own inventory as we share ours. This goes a long way toward reassuring us that we are not unique.

The trust we must have in the person who is to hear our Fifth Step goes beyond simply being assured that he or she will keep our confidences. We need to trust that our listener can respond appropriately to what we are sharing. One of the primary reasons that so many of us find ourselves choosing our sponsor as the person who will listen to our Fifth Step is because he or she understands what we're doing and therefore knows just what kind of support we need during this process. Also, if our sponsor is our listener, it will help promote continuity when we work the following steps. Still, if for any reason we choose someone else to hear our Fifth Step admission, his or her "qualifications" are the same ones we would look for in our sponsor: an ability to be supportive without minimizing our responsibility, someone who can provide a steadying influence if we begin to feel overwhelmed during our Fifth Step—in short, someone with compassion, integrity, and insight.

- What qualities does my listener have that are attractive to me?
- How will his or her possession of these qualities help me make my admissions more effectively?

For most of us, developing an honest relationship is something new. We're very good at running away from relationships the first time someone tells us a painful truth. We're also good at having polite, distant interactions with no real depth. The Fifth Step helps us to develop honest relationships. We tell the truth about who we are—then, the hard part: We listen to the response. Most of us have been terrified of having a relationship like this. The Fifth Step gives us a unique opportunity to try such a relationship in a safe context. We can be pretty much assured that we won't be judged.

- Am I willing to trust the person who is to hear my Fifth Step?
- What do I expect from that person?
- How will working the Fifth Step help me begin to develop new ways of having relationships?

The Exact Nature of Our Wrongs

Another way to ensure that our Fifth Step is "not simply a reading of Step Four" is to focus on what we are supposed to be admitting: the *exact nature* of our wrongs. There is a diversity of experience in our fellowship about what, precisely, is "the exact nature of our wrongs." Most of us agree that, in working Step Five, we should be focusing our attention on what's behind the patterns of our addiction and the reasons we acted out in the ways we did. Identifying the exact nature of our wrongs is often something that happens while we're sharing our inventory. Sometimes the repetition of the same type of situation will reveal the exact nature of that situation. Why do we, for example, keep choosing to involve ourselves with people who don't have our best interests at heart? Why do we keep approaching every relationship we have as though our very lives depended on having the upper hand? Why do we feel threatened by new experiences, and so keep avoiding them? Finding the common thread in our own patterns will lead us right to the exact nature of our wrongs.

At some point in this process, we will probably begin calling certain patterns of behavior our "character defects." Though it won't be until the Sixth Step that we begin an in-depth examination of how each one of our defects plays a role in keeping us sick, it certainly won't hurt to allow this knowledge to begin forming in us now.

- How does the exact nature of my wrongs differ from my actions?
- Why do I need to admit the *exact nature* of my wrongs, and not just the wrongs themselves?

Spiritual Principles

In the Fifth Step, we will focus on trust, courage, self-honesty, and commitment. Practicing the spiritual principle of trust is essential if we are to get through the Fifth Step. As mentioned above, we will probably have some experience with our sponsor

that allows us to trust him or her enough to go ahead with this step; but what about the more profound issues that arise when we wonder if working this step will really do any good? We have to trust a process as well as another person. The connection between the Fifth Step and our spiritual development isn't always clear to us. This doesn't mean that the connection is any less real, but it may make it harder for us to trust the process.

- Do I believe that working the Fifth Step will somehow make my life better? How?

Courage is one principle we'll have to practice just to get started on this step. We'll probably need to continue drawing on our courage periodically throughout our work on this step. When we replace the phone on its hook just as we are about to call our sponsor for an appointment to make our admissions, we're feeling fear and we need to practice courage. When we're sharing our inventory and we see a paragraph that we just can't tell anyone about, we need to face that moment of fear with courage and go ahead with sharing *all* of our inventory. When we've just shared something excruciatingly painful, and our feelings of vulnerability are so overwhelming that we want to shut down before we hear what our sponsor has to say, we're at a defining moment in our recovery and we need to choose the courageous path. Doing so will influence the future course of our lives. Each time we feel fear, we remind ourselves that giving in to it has rarely had anything but negative consequences in our lives, and doing so this time won't be any different. Such a reminder should be sufficient to motivate us to gather our courage.

- What are some of the ways in which I can find the courage I need to work this step?
- How does practicing the principle of courage in working this step affect my whole recovery?
- Have I set a time and place for my Fifth Step? When and where?

Practicing the principle of self-honesty is essential when we admit to ourselves the exact nature of our wrongs. Just as we mustn't disassociate ourselves from our emotions simply because we're afraid of our listener's response, so we can't afford to shut down our own reactions. We must allow ourselves to experience the natural and human reaction to the subject under discussion: our lives as addicts. Our lives have been sad. We've missed out on a lot because of our addiction. We've hurt people we loved because of our addiction. These realizations are painful. However, if we pay close attention, we'll probably recognize another feeling that's beginning to form in the wake of the pain: hope.

We've finally stopped using over our feelings, running away from our feelings, and shutting down because of our feelings; now, for the first time, we have a chance to walk through our feelings, even the painful ones, with courage. Doing so will, in the long run, make us feel better about ourselves. This is one of the paradoxes that we often find in recovery. What begins in pain ends in joy and serenity.

- How have I avoided self-honesty in the past? What am I doing to practice it now?
- How is a more realistic view of myself connected to humility?
- How does practicing the principle of self-honesty help me accept myself?

The principle of commitment is demonstrated by the action we take in this step. Many of us have made so-called "commitments" in our lives, commitments which we had no intention of sticking to in tough times; our "commitments" were made solely for the sake of convenience. With each step we've taken in the program of NA, we've deepened our real, practical commitment to the program. Getting a sponsor, working the steps, finding a home group and going to its meetings—each one of these actions demonstrates that we're committed to our recovery in a practical, meaningful way.

- How does sharing my inventory with my sponsor further my commitment to the NA program?

Moving on

One of the many benefits we get from working Step Five is a sense of self-acceptance. We clearly recognize who we are today, and accept ourselves without reservation. Just because we're lacking in certain areas doesn't mean we're worthless. We begin to see that we have both assets and defects. We're capable of great good—and of inflicting great harm. There are aspects of our personalities that make us very special. Our experiences, even the negative ones, have often contributed to the development of the very best parts of us. For the first time, we're able to acknowledge that we're okay just as we are, right at this moment. But accepting ourselves as we are today doesn't mean we can relax and stop striving for improvement. True self-acceptance includes accepting what we're lacking. It wouldn't be self-acceptance if we believed we had no further growing to do—it would be denial. So we acknowledge what we're lacking, and we make a commitment to work on it. If we want to be more compassionate, we work on it by practicing the principle of compassion. If we want to be better educated, we take the time to learn. If we want to have more friends, we take the time to develop our relationships.

- How has working Step Five increased my humility and self-acceptance?

As we finish Step Five, we may feel a sense of relief; we've unburdened ourselves by sharing what we previously had put a lot of energy into hiding or suppressing. It is true that our "defects... die in the light of exposure." Exposure to the light brings a sense of freedom that we feel no matter what the outer circumstances of our lives may be like.

All of our relationships begin to change as a result of working this step. We especially need to acknowledge how much our relationships with ourselves, with a Higher Power, and with other people have changed:

Step Five

- How has my relationship with a Higher Power changed as a result of working the Fifth Step?
- How has my relationship with my sponsor changed as a result of working the Fifth Step?
- How has my view of myself changed as a result of working this step?
- To what extent have I developed love and compassion for myself and others?

Along with a sense of relief, our weariness with our character defects has probably reached a peak. This will translate easily into a state of being entirely ready—just what we need to begin Step Six!

*"We were entirely ready to
have God remove all these
defects of character."*

—Step Six

We begin working Step Six full of the hope we have developed in the first five steps. If we have been thorough, we have also developed some humility. In Step Six, "humility" means that we're able to see ourselves more clearly. We've seen the exact nature of our wrongs. We've seen how we've harmed ourselves and others by acting on our defects of character. We've seen the patterns of our behavior, and we've come to understand how we are likely to act on the same defects over and over. Now we have to become entirely ready to have our defects of character removed.

Becoming entirely ready won't happen in an instant. It's a long process, often taking place over the course of a whole lifetime. Immediately following an inventory, we may feel very ready indeed to have our defects removed. If we've been around awhile and are generally pretty well aware of what our defects are, and we still act on one of them, we'll naturally find that our willingness level rises. Awareness alone will never be enough to ensure our readiness, but it's the necessary first step on the path to readiness. The inventory process itself has raised our awareness about our character defects; working the Sixth Step will do so even more. To be entirely ready is to reach a spiritual state where we are not just aware of our defects; not just tired of them; not just confident that the God of our understanding will remove what should go—but all these things.

In order to become entirely ready, we'll need to address our fears about the Sixth Step. We'll also need to take a look at how our defects will be removed. The Sixth Step says that only a Higher Power can remove them, but what does that mean in practical terms? What is our responsibility in the Sixth Step? These questions, when reviewed with a sponsor, will help give us direction in working this step.

Entirely Ready for *What*?

If we're new in NA and this is our first experience with the Sixth Step, many of our character defects will be so blatant that our immediate reaction will likely be one of overwhelming willingness to get rid of them. We're seeing them for the first time, in all their glory, so to speak, and we want them gone—today!

Once we've gotten past our initial reaction, we'll find that we probably have at least some measure of fear or uncertainty about changing. The unknown is terrifying for almost everyone. We've had the defects we're about to let go of for a long time, probably most of our lives.

We probably have some fears about what our lives will be like without these defects. Some of them may seem more like vital survival skills than defects of character. We wonder if the removal of our defects will inhibit our ability to earn a living. We may find that the idea of being a "respectable citizen" is repulsive to us. Many of us are strongly attached to an image—we're cool, we're trendy, we're outside the bounds of polite society, and we like it that way. We may be afraid that by working the Sixth Step we'll be

changed into dull conformists. Some of us may think that we're nothing but defects, and wonder what will be left of us if our defects are removed. Our fears are probably vague and unformed. If we pursue them to their logical conclusion, we're sure to find that they are unfounded. In other words, if we say them out loud, we can see them for what they are.

- Are there parts of me I like, but which might be "defects"? Am I afraid I'll turn into someone I don't like if those parts of my character are removed?
- What do I think will be removed?

If we've had some previous experience with the Sixth Step, our character defects are nothing new. In fact, we may be feeling dismayed right now that we still have a certain defect, or we may be upset because we're looking at the same old defect in a new manifestation.

For instance, we're still insecure. We may no longer run around indulging in a series of transparent attempts to convince others that we're big shots, but we still have the defect. The way we've been acting on it lately is far more subtle and far more insidious. We may have been unconsciously sabotaging the efforts of others so that we can look better by comparison, or trampling on someone else's desires because they don't directly serve our own needs. What's especially painful about realizations such as this in later recovery is that we've tended to think of ourselves in a better light. We're deeply ashamed of harming others. We may feel a dull fear that we're incapable of change, that one character defect or another is here to stay. We can draw some measure of comfort from the fact that we're now aware of what we've been doing and are willing to work on it. We need to maintain a sense of hope and trust that the process of recovery works even on the most firmly entrenched defects.

- Do I still believe in the process of recovery? Do I believe I can change? How have I changed so far? What defects do I no longer have to act on?
- Do I have any defects that I think cannot be removed? What are they? Why do I think they cannot be removed?

...to Have God Remove...

Yes, the Sixth Step specifies that only a Power greater than ourselves can remove our defects of character. However, the extent to which most of us grasp what that actually means is directly influenced by how much experience we have with the up-and-down, on-again-off-again struggle and surrender associated with Step Six.

The first thing most of us do about our character defects is decide not to have them. Unfortunately, this is futile—about as effective as attempting to control our using. We may have some apparent success for a time, but our defects will eventually resurface. The problem is that our defects are part of us. We will always be subject to reverting to our worst character defects in stressful situations.

What we need to do in the Sixth Step is much like what we had to do in the first two steps. We have to admit that we have been defeated by an internal force that has brought nothing but pain and degradation to our lives; then, we have to admit we need help in dealing with that force. We must completely accept the fact that we cannot remove our own shortcomings, and we must prepare ourselves to ask in the Seventh Step for God to remove them for us.

- How am I trying to remove or control my own character defects?
What have my attempts resulted in?
- What is the difference between being entirely ready to have God remove my defects of character and suppressing them myself?
- How am I increasing my trust in the God of my understanding by working this step?
- How does my surrender deepen in this step?
- What action can I take that shows that I am entirely ready?

Our Defects of Character

Even after all the work we've done in the Fourth and Fifth Steps, we're still not entirely clear at this point about the nature of our defects of character. We're probably wondering where, precisely, our character *defects* end and our *character* begins within the complex structure of our personality. Why do we do the things we do? Is it someone's fault? When did we first feel this way? Why? How? Where? If we're not careful, we can become so self-obsessed that we lose sight of why we're working a Sixth Step. We need to focus our efforts. Our goal is to raise our awareness of our character defects so that we can become entirely ready to have them removed, not to analyze their origin or indulge in a bout of self-absorption.

Our character defects are indicators of our basic nature. We are likely to find that we have the same basic nature as anyone else. We have needs, and we try to get them met. For instance, we need love. How we go about getting love is where our defects come into play. If we lie, cheat, or harm others and degrade ourselves to get love, we are acting on defects. As defined in *It Works: How and Why*, our defects are basic human traits that have been distorted by our self-centeredness. With our sponsor's help, we need to list each defect we have, describe the ways in which we act on it, look at how it affects our lives, and, very importantly, find out what we're feeling when we practice it. Imagining what our life would be like without each defect will help us see that we can live without it. Some of us take practical action by finding out what the opposite spiritual principle would be for each character defect.

- List each defect, and give a brief definition of it.
- In what ways do I act on this defect?
- When I act on this defect, what effect does it have on myself and others?

- What feelings do I associate with this defect?
Am I trying to suppress certain feelings by acting on certain defects?
- What would my life be like without this behavior? Which spiritual principle can I apply instead?

Spiritual Principles

In the Sixth Step, we will focus on commitment and perseverance, willingness, faith and trust, and self-acceptance. At this point in our Sixth Step work, we should be acutely aware of our shortcomings. In fact, we're probably so aware of them that, in the course of our daily lives, we can see them coming and even stop ourselves from acting on them much of the time. At times, our awareness may fade, and we may no longer be as vigilant in watching our behavior. It takes an incredible amount of energy to monitor ourselves every second and curb every impulse to act out. We'll relax into everyday life until, all of a sudden, we'll be left feeling sick and ashamed and wondering how, after all the work we've done, we could have possibly done *that* again.

However, we do not give up. Instead, we make a commitment to our recovery. We maintain our newly emerging principles despite our setback. We keep taking steps forward even though we've taken one or more backward. We're looking for gradual improvement, not instant faultlessness.

- How am I demonstrating my commitment to recovery today?
- By working the first five steps, I have persevered in my recovery. Why is this quality so vital to the Sixth Step?

Applying the spiritual principle of willingness means, very simply, that we are willing to act differently. It does not necessarily mean that we will act differently or even that we're capable of doing so. We can perhaps best illustrate this attitude by an example. Suppose we've been dishonest—with our families, with our employers, with our friends—in many ways, ranging from the minor to the severe. While it may seem better to become willing in "layers," focusing our willingness on the worst or most destructive forms of dishonesty first, this step says that we were *entirely* ready to have *all* our defects removed. That means being willing never to be dishonest again, even in a minor way. This may seem like more than we can expect of ourselves, but we only have to do it for today.

It's hard to have this kind of willingness, especially when the apparent consequences for mild dishonesty aren't so severe. We may be aware that we're not being entirely honest, but we think we're not hurting anyone and we're getting away with it, so why be concerned about it? But it's this kind of thinking that has perhaps the most severe spiritual consequences. It may turn out that no one is obviously harmed by our dishonesty, and that no one ever finds out, but the dishonesty reverberates in our spirits from

then on. Even if we're not consciously aware of it, even if we sleep just fine at night, the result of acting on a defect when we have the ability not to is an impairment of our spiritual growth. If we continue being unwilling, we'll eventually paralyze our spiritual growth.

- Am I willing to have all my defects of character removed at this time? If not, why not?
- What have I done to show my willingness today?

The amount of willingness we have to develop in this step requires a corresponding amount of faith and trust. We have to believe that a Higher Power is going to work in our lives to the exact degree that's necessary. Continuing with the example of dishonesty, we have to trust that our Higher Power isn't going to remove the defect of dishonesty from our lives to such a degree that we become brutally honest, incapable of remaining silent even when speaking the truth would hurt someone. As long as we get out of the way so that God can work in our lives, we'll experience the exact degree of spiritual growth we need.

- To what degree is my fear of what I will become still present? Has it diminished since I began working this step?
- How am I increasing my trust in the God of my understanding by working this step?

With words like "entirely" and "all" playing such a prominent role in this step, it's easy to become overly self-critical and perfectionistic. We need to remember that even though our willingness must be complete, we're not going to become perfect—not today, not ever. When we act out on a defect against our will, we need to practice the principle of self-acceptance. We need to accept that while we're still capable of acting out, we're also still willing to change; with that acknowledgment, we renew our commitment to be changed. We've grown exactly as much as we were supposed to for today, and if we were perfect, we would have no further need to grow.

- Do I accept myself today? What do I like about myself? What has changed since I've been working the steps?

Moving on

We may have had fleeting glimpses in the past of what we could become—maybe during childhood, maybe during our active addiction. We probably thought either that life didn't put us in a place where we could become what we dreamed of, or that we were just innately incapable of rising to a higher place. We may once have dreamed of money, or status, or position. In the spiritual program of Narcotics Anonymous, we're more concerned with spiritual growth. We want to think about qualities we wish we had, or about other people we know in recovery who have qualities we wish to emulate.

As we work this step, we begin developing a vision of the person we'd like to become. If we have been selfish, we probably have a vision of becoming selfless, maybe by helping another addict find recovery or by some other act of selfless giving. If we've been lazy, we may see ourselves becoming productive and reaping the rewards of our efforts. If we've been dishonest, we may have a dream of the freedom that can be ours when we no longer have to spend so much time worrying about being found out. We want to get from this step a vision of ourselves and a sense of hope that we can attain that vision.

- What do I see myself doing with the qualities I wish to attain?
What will I do with my career? What will I do in my spare time?
What kind of parent, child, partner, or friend will I be? Be specific.

This vision can be our inspiration. Recalling it during the times when we feel despair, or when it seems to be taking a long time to reach our goals, will sustain us and help us renew our willingness. Our vision is our springboard into Step Seven, where we'll ask the God of our understanding to remove our shortcomings.

*“We humbly asked Him to
remove our shortcomings.”*

—Step Seven

Though each of the Twelve Steps is a separate process unto itself, they all blend together to some degree as their parts interact with one another aspects of Step One fusing into Step Two, components of Step Four meshing into the following steps. Perhaps the finest line between two steps is the one between Steps Six and Seven. At first glance, Step Seven may seem almost an afterthought to Step Six. We spent a great deal of time and effort raising our awareness of our character defects in Step Six and getting to the point where we were entirely ready to have them removed; now all we need to do is ask, right?

Not exactly. There's much more to this step than just filing a request with our Higher Power and waiting for a response. There's spiritual preparation. There's the need to develop an understanding about what "humbly" means in this context. There's the need to find a way of asking that fits into our individual spiritual paths. And there's the need to practice spiritual principles in the place of character defects.

Preparing to Work Step Seven

We've already done much of the spiritual preparation we'll need to begin Step Seven. It's important that we draw the connection between the work we've done and the results that work has produced.

The previous steps have all served to sow the seeds of humility in our spirits. In this step, those seeds take root and grow. Many of us have difficulty with the concept of humility, and while we began addressing this issue in Step Six, it merits attention in Step Seven, too. We need to understand what humility is for us and how its presence is revealed in our lives.

We should not confuse humility with humiliation. When we are humiliated, we are ashamed; we feel worthless. Humility is almost the complete opposite of this feeling. Through working the steps, we've been stripping away layers of denial, ego, and self-centeredness. We have also been building a more positive self-image and practicing spiritual principles. Before, we couldn't see our strengths because the good, healthy part of us was hidden behind our disease. Now we can. That is humility. Some examples of how humility is often revealed may help us understand this concept.

We started out in recovery with fixed ideas. Since we've been in recovery, everything we believed in the past has been challenged. We've been barraged with new ideas. For instance, if we believed we were in control, just the fact that we've wound up in NA admitting our powerlessness was probably enough to change our outlook. Because of our addiction, we failed to learn the lessons that life itself would have taught us about how much control one individual has. Through our abstinence and the working of the first six steps, we have learned a great deal about how to live.

Many of us came to NA with a certain "street" mentality. The only way we knew to get what we wanted was by approaching it indirectly and manipulating people. We didn't

realize that we could just be forthright and have the same chance, if not better, of fulfilling our needs. We spent years learning to blank our facial expressions, hide our compassion, and harden ourselves. By the time we arrived in NA, we were very good at it—so good, in fact, that novice addicts were probably looking to our example the same way we looked to older addicts when we first started using. We learned to suppress all humanity and became, in many cases, completely inhuman.

Removing ourselves from the arena in which such games are played exposed us to new ideas. We learned that it was okay to have feelings and to show them. We found out that the rules of the street only made sense on the street; in the real world, they were crazy and often dangerous. We became softer, more vulnerable. We no longer mistook kindness for weakness.

Changing these attitudes has a dramatic effect. Oftentimes, it even changes our physical appearance. Knotted brows and jaws relax into smiles. Tears flow freely out, uncovering our drowning spirit.

Many of us arrived in NA convinced that we were victims of bad luck, unfavorable circumstances, and conspiracies to thwart our good intentions. We believed we were good people, but profoundly misunderstood. We justified any harm we caused as self-defense, if we were capable of realizing that we caused harm at all. Feelings of self-pity went hand-in-hand with that attitude. We reveled in our suffering, and we secretly knew that the payoff for our pain was never, ever having to look at our part in anything.

But the first six steps get us to begin to do just that—we look at our part in things. Once we thought that certain situations happened *to* us; now we see how those situations were really created *by* us. We become aware of all the opportunities we've wasted. We stop blaming other people for our lot in life. We begin to see that where we've ended up has been determined mostly by the choices we've made.

Humility is a sense of our own humanness. If this is our first experience with the Seventh Step, this may be the point when we first feel a sense of compassion for ourselves. It's deeply moving to realize for the first time that we're truly just human and trying our best. We make decisions, both good and bad, and hope things turn out okay. With this knowledge about who we are, we also realize that just as we're doing our best, so are other people. We feel a real connection with others, knowing that we're all subject to the same insecurities and failings and that we all have dreams for the future.

Now we need to acknowledge our own humility and explore how it makes itself known in our everyday lives.

- Which of my attitudes have changed since I've been in recovery? Where has the overblown been deflated, and where has the healthy part of me been uncovered?
- How does humility affect my recovery?
- How does being aware of my own humility help when working this step?